

SOCIAL CUSTOMS.

000 The Gros Ventre system of terms of relationship has been given in a
605 former publication.¹

601 Cousins, so far as the relationship was known, were called brothers and
[582] sisters, and they called each other's children son or daughter if the cousin
[587] was of the same sex as the speaker, or nephew or niece if the cousin was of
the opposite sex. Any known relationship was a bar to marriage. The
brother of a dead man sometimes married his widow, but this was not
always the case.

583 Large amounts of property, especially horses, were given away for wives
for the honor of the act, but there was no rule or definite custom covering
the quantity of property so given. The horses might be given not only to
the father, but to the brothers, uncles, and other relatives of the girl. Some-
times, without having received any gifts and apparently without any previous
understanding, a man would give his daughter to a young man, who there-
upon would give him horses, or distribute them among his wife's other rela-
tives. Old men practised this custom in order to obtain the aid and services
of a young man in caring for their horses and in other ways, and no doubt
585 sometimes also to insure a more certain food-supply. A young man on
431 marrying received a tent with all the proper furniture, usually from his
prospective parents-in-law, but sometimes from his own parents, if they
were the wealthier.

606 Although a young married man often lived with his father-in-law, the
[591] well-known taboo custom between mother-in-law and son-in-law — which
forbade their speaking, looking at each other, or being in the same tent
— existed among the Gros Ventre. There was, however, no father-in-law
taboo. The mother-in-law taboo extended to the son-in-law's brother.

584 If a woman did not wish a man for her lover, she might send him to do a
721 certain act of bravery. If he returned successfully from war, having accom-
plished the deed, he was then accepted. This custom is said to have led
to the death of many young men.

428 At a person's death his property was inherited generally by his relatives.
His father and mother, brothers, sisters, and children would receive part.
His father and mother received the most. A man often disposed of his
property before his death. If he died suddenly, as on being killed in war,
his parents divided his property. It was not customary for a man on going
to war to divide his property among his relatives in the contingency of his
[764] death. Property particularly valued by the dead person was buried with
him.

¹ Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XVIII, Part I, pp. 9, 150.

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ther" includes mother's sister, female cousin, father's brother's wife. This was neatly illustrated in an instance given by Mary Ereaux. "My mother's cousin's husband came to my house a few weeks ago and wanted to ask me something about arrangements for the pop concession at the Fair. It was a matter of serious business and he and I stood, each looking in a different direction, talking only about the matter in hand. After he had left, my son-in-law, who is not an Indian, and who does not understand the Gros Ventre language, said: 'Mother, you looked as though you were mad at that man.' So I told him: 'In the Indian way, that man would be the same as my father, because his wife would be in the same relation to me as my mother, so we never talk unless necessary and never look at each other while talking.'"

The term "aunt" is reserved for father's sister and female cousins, and "uncle" for mother's brother and male cousins. Here, too, heightened reserve characterized the cross-sex relationship. "A man would not address his 'aunt' directly unless by chance she would be the only one there and he needed information. He would under no circumstances linger to make conversation with her. The same for a woman and her 'uncle.'"

PARENTS-IN-LAW

The respect between members of the opposite sex who are of contiguous generations was most apparent in the avoidance between mother-in-law and son-in-law. This required that the two neither look at nor speak to each other at any time. It was stated that some men disregarded these rules after the death of the wife, "but most used to keep them all the time." There was one case mentioned in which the son-in-law of a very old woman told his wife: "Your mother is getting very old now. We won't see each other much longer anyway. It would be all right for your mother to come in to our lodge." Both Coming Daylight and Singer insisted nevertheless that, should such a proposal be made, the son-in-law would be the one to make the initiative, never the mother-in-law.

The avoidance between father-in-law and daughter-in-law was almost as strictly observed, in that a woman could not look directly at her father-in-law when she spoke to him, and she did not

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606 even speak to him if it could be avoided. A man showed about the same degree of reserve to his father-in-law as he would to his own father, and a woman to her mother-in-law as to her own mother. Traditionally, a son-in-law was supposed to treat his parents-in-law well in the sense that he would send them a large proportion of the proceeds of his hunt. A woman would take the meat to her mother saying: "This is what your son-in-law sends you." Frequently the mother of the woman selected the choicest parts of this game to send as a return gift to her son-in-law. Parents-in-law were expected to publicly show pride in the achievements of their sons-in-law to about the same extent they would in those of their own sons. One especially nice way of showing appreciation of a good son-in-law was for his mother-in-law to make for and formally present to him a fancy robe and decorated moc-casins to "dress him up" for dancing and for other occasions when finery was displayed. It was not uncommon, too, that shortly after marriage the bride's father would give a feast to which he invited his son-in-law, along with a number of his own friends, in order to "show his son-in-law how to observe the laws of hospitality and generosity in food." Later on, of course, a man would then once in a while include his father-in-law among those whom he invited.

Furthermore, a woman was supposed to be very generous to her son's wife in the way of keeping her supplied with berries and so on. Yet reciprocity was not expected, as illustrated by Cora's remark: "Most of the time it is the mother-in-law's place to do a lot for her son's wife. But I used to give berries and other nice things to my husband's mother, and she would laugh, because in the old days it would have been the other way around." And Coming Daylight's experience with her own daughter-in-law reveals something of the attitude in former times. Coming Daylight said: "I like my sons' wives just as much as I do my sons themselves. In fact I love them just as dearly as I do my own children. One time when I returned from working near the present Fort Belknap, the wife of my eldest son brought me some berry soup along with a big sackful of berries she had just gathered. I was so touched I said: 'You kill me but you don't kill me,' which is the equivalent of saying it was wonderful for a daughter-

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in-law to do anything of the kind for her mother-in-law. So I 606 ●
gave that daughter-in-law two horses."

Although economic obligations were not incumbent, the relationship terms were used, and avoidances practiced, between parents-in-law and the brothers and sisters of the man and wife respectively. It was explained: "The brothers of a man respected his mother-in-law because in the old days it could happen that if a man died his brother might take the wife. And the same with a woman, because they had the custom of giving all the girls in a family to the same man if they liked him." (587)

SIBLINGS OF OPPOSITE SEX

Among members of the same generation, the most marked respect was exhibited between siblings of opposite sex, and was extended to include all cousins. There was no relationship term for "cousin," all using sibling terms of address and without distinguishing between parallel- and cross-cousins. 593 605 [601]

Since a girl was removed from her own family at an early age and was brought up in a different household, actual face-to-face contact between brothers and sisters was slight. Nevertheless, their attitudes toward each other had important consequences with many ramifications. As interpreted by the Gros Ventres, the basic relationship between siblings of opposite sex gave clues to understanding expected behavior in several other categories of kinship, —in the avunculate and amitate, as well as in the relations between in-laws of the same sex and generation.

If it could possibly be avoided, brother and sister did not speak to nor look directly at each other. They communicated through a third person. Gros Ventres, who are today in middle age, explained how embarrassed they were as children when the authorities did not understand "the proper way of doing things." For instance, the good sisters and priests in charge of St Paul's, which at that time was a boarding-school, insisted as a privilege for the boys that they visit their sisters on Sunday afternoons in the girls' part of the school! How deeply this feeling of respect penetrates was brought home to the present author by the following incident. "One day she was with Mary and Coming Daylight, while waiting for Charles Buckman, who was to drive her to another part of the

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525 Gambling between blood relatives for property the loss of which would hurt or would entail even small hardship on the loser was evidently looked upon as conflicting with the common loyalty and mutual helpfulness among all blood relatives that were expected by the Gros Ventre social code. The Gros Ventre felt, furthermore, that such gambling might easily give rise to quarreling and ill-will among relatives, whereas the code expected harmony and good will.

As regards affinal relatives, the rules were more complicated and less uniform. Loyalty, helpfulness, and harmony were desired and expected among close relatives by marriage, but the avoidance, respect, and familiarity conventions differed.

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525 A son-in-law could not gamble at all against his mother-in-law, even on different sides for "cooking" for the winners. On the one hand the rule of respect and avoidance was the most rigid and absolute within the avoidance regulations: they could not look at or speak directly to each other, and could not be in the same lodge together. On the other hand they were expected to be very good and generous to each other. It may be added that these restrictions on the son-in-law applied also to his brothers, presumably too to the mother-in-law's sisters, although we failed to inquire about this last point.

602 As regards all other relatives by marriage, they, even those prohibited from gambling even for small stakes, were permitted, it seems, to gamble as members of groups against one another where the stakes, if they can really be called such, were merely the above-mentioned "cooking" by the losing side for the winners. Some affinal relatives, however, such as father-in-law and daughter-in-law could not engage in a non-group twosome game, even for fun, just as brother and sister could not do so.

A son-in-law and father-in-law could not gamble against each other even for small wagers; the former could not gamble with the latter's brothers or even his close friends—and presumably vice versa, the father-in-law could not with the son-in-law's. Nor, as mentioned, could daughter-in-law with father-in-law. A son-in-law and father-in-law were under certain restrictions of respect and avoidance but not so absolute as those between son-in-law and mother-in-law; the two men could discuss "business" matters with each other, but could not just sit down and chat together about trivial things and especially about anything concerning sex or the eliminative functions. And about the same rule held for daughter-in-law and father-in-law in their personal relations.

Two brothers-in-law, two sisters-in-law, or a brother-in-law and his sister-in-law (wife's sister or brother's wife) could gamble against each other for small

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stakes, but not for really large ones. A gambling game between two brothers-in-law, small though the stakes had to be, was a good show for the onlookers—⁶⁰⁶ not, however, nearly so good as one between two prominent enemy friends. ⁵²⁵ Two sisters-in-law were also "just right" for gambling against each other.

Through all these three relationships run two currents: one of mutual goodwill and helpfulness, the other of familiarity, "teasing" and twitting. Between two brothers-in-law and two sisters-in-law there is relatively more of the first and less of the second; between brother-in-law and sister-in-law relatively more of the second and less of the first.

Two brothers-in-law could not discuss sex or vulgarity and could not go to the toilet together. They would be helpful to each other in giving presents, in a building project, in business matters, and so forth. But on the other hand they could go quite far in "humiliating" each other, in indulging in practical jokes and horse play at the other's expense, and in rivaling each other in war and in war-deed matching contests—but not to the limit, not so far as enemy friends could go. Two sisters-in-law could likewise "tease" each other, but could not go to the same length that brothers-in-law could go. ^[522]

To her brother-in-law (sister's husband or husband's brother) a woman could go nearly any length in "teasing" and freedom in the way of crude horse play and of vulgar and obscene talk, and vice versa.

The gambling rule that prevailed, and still prevails largely, between these three types of siblings-in-law, namely, gambling for small stakes permitted and encouraged, but not for large stakes, appears to be genetically related to the two currents we have been discussing: the goodwill one prohibiting stakes whose loss would really hurt, the familiarity one permitting and provoking small-stake gambling. ⁶¹⁹

The Gros Ventre, with a population range of between about 800 and 2,000 ⁵²⁵ in the second half of the last century, were divided into about a dozen bands. ⁶²¹ These bands were not sibs proper, but each was composed largely of kin ^[167] related by blood or marriage. Members of a given band, whether related or not, would not gamble against one another. There was a well-marked we-feeling among the members of a band, somewhat distinct from and additional to the kinship feeling proper. Actually this was almost equivalent to "tribal" we-feeling, for each band was for the greater part of the year, particularly in the winter months when the bands scattered to separate quarters within the tribal territory, an almost completely autonomous economico-political unit, and any band was free if it wished to secede from the tribe at any time, temporarily or permanently.